

The Australian National University

**National Institute of the Arts**

**School of Art**

**Bachelor of Arts (Visual) Honours**

Helen Shelley

STUDIO REPORT

PRESENTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE  
Bachelor of Arts (Visual) Honours

2003

## CONTENTS

### Page

3	Acknowledgements
4	Work proposal, semester one
5	Work proposal, semester two
6	Abstract
7	Introduction
7	'Landscape painting'
11	Abstracting the landscape
18	A change in construction
22	Considering the pattern
28	The final process
30	Conclusion
31	Bibliography
33	List of images
34	Artist statement
35	The resulting works



I would like to acknowledge and give thanks to the following people for their assistance and support:

Robert Boynes

Deborah Singleton

Peter Jordan

John, Barbara, Annette and Robert Shelley

My fellow Eye Blockers

Glenn Taylor

Dave Wong

## Semester 1 Work Proposal

### Aims/subject of proposal

The subject of my proposed work method is closely related to an area I began to explore during third year: pop up cities. An idea that came about through viewing Canberra from a distance and noting how it appeared miniscule and toy-like. I had a realization that all that we create is in a state of flux, regardless of the permanence we attempt to achieve through structures.

### Research/working process

I shall construct miniature cities from materials which may be easily erected and dismantled (cardboard, matchsticks and paper), pertaining to the idea of pop up, toy-like cities. The miniature landscapes will then become the source from which I paint.

### Methods and Materials

I will be painting with acrylic paint on canvas. The small buildings will be painted in a representational fashion as I wish for them to be seen as things that exist, however the space in the work will be an ambiguous one as I want the viewer to be unsure of the objects scale and their function.

### Timeframe

I intend to paint fifteen paintings during my honours year of study.

## Semester 2 Work Proposal

### Aims/subject of proposal

Through my proposed area of study I aim to show familiar materials in a different context as a means of questioning what is considered the norm. I shall use the object as an example of how all that we create is subject to fashion and it's value changes accordingly, how all that we create is transitory, to detach myself somewhat from my current existence and view our human actions objectively, (often as a stimulus for humour), hence the title of my body of work Seeing the Object Objectively.

### Research/working process

The process by which the works will be realized will be as follows. I will construct three dimensional abstract objects and environments from wallpapers. The photographs I take of the scenes will become the source from which I paint. I will paint the images within the photographs in a representational fashion as I wish for them to viewed as documentations of an abstract thing rather than something that has been interpreted in an abstract fashion.

### Methods and materials

I shall paint with diluted acrylics that have been mixed with whiting upon a heavily gessoed canvas as to achieve a chalky, matt appearance, similar to that of wallpaper.

### Timeframe

I aim to complete ten paintings of various scale in the following semester, (semester two).

## Seeing the Object Objectively

By constructing abstract objects out of familiar materials, I have aimed to abstract the familiar, and therefore lead one to be intrigued and question that which is familiar.

Seeing the Object Objectively is a body of work in which I used the object as an example of how odd and abstract our made environment can appear, when viewed in an objective fashion.

The body of work that resulted from my honours year of study is titled “Seeing the Object Objectively.” I wanted to explore the idea that our recognition of objects as familiar or normal is based on them being in their appropriate physical and historical context. By manipulating familiar materials in such a way that they become abstract forms, I change the context in which such materials are usually viewed. My research is aimed at making the viewer be intrigued and question that which is familiar, to parallel my own thoughts that much of what we create is really quite odd.

Artists who influenced and supported this way of thinking and consequently the appearance of my work, were those who through various means aimed to make that which is familiar appear odd. I shall give example of the work of Alexander Rodchenko, Laszlo Maholy Nagy, Sarah Sze, Jessica Stockholder and Howard Arkley.

The research of both contemporary and historical design supported and developed my idea on viewing objects out of their usual context, as a means of seeing contemporary objects in a more objective way.

Through this report I shall illustrate how my work developed and how this research informed my final body of work.

### **‘Landscape painting’**

My work method was borne through my failings as a landscape painter. The source from which I was originally inspired was the landscape, (as viewed from my car) on the stretch of road between Canberra and Orange. Robert Boynes commented on how he thought I did not seem to enjoy painting the landscape. Deborah Singleton agreed with Robert’s comment and said that in order to paint the landscape I must be amongst it, which did not sound appealing. On yet another answer seeking, panic driven, landscape searching drive up Black Mountain I started to feel somewhat assured. From that height the monolithic appeared miniscule, a toy-like Canberra, and the anxiousness I felt about my life seemed

absurd. From that perspective, I well,... gained some perspective. Harking back to Robert and Deborah's comments and agreeing with what they had said, gave me the idea that if I did not enjoy painting the natural landscape I should build my own, and these would be the source from which I would paint.

The way in which I approached the making of the three-dimensional environments prompted me to question what forms our aesthetic sensibility and what makes certain things appeal to us? I remembered a game that my brother and I would play when young. Little Creatures began in much the same way on each occasion. We would happen upon the so called little creatures and then build appropriately small housing in trees out of twigs, pine-needles, dirt and small toys. In retrospect I'm quite sure the book *The Borrowers* encouraged this idea. I realized that Little Creatures is not so far removed from my current work method. Should this make me feel disheartened that my work method has not seemingly progressed a great deal from the age of six to twenty three? Rather it supports previous thoughts I have had on aesthetic sensibility, that it is a collection of thoughts and images collected throughout ones life. The book, *Spray*, which focuses on the work of Howard Arkley, reinforced this idea. In the text Arkley discusses his origins of suburbia, and consequently how this has influenced his aesthetic. "Most of the population live in an urban environment. This environment affects us, our formative years, so it is a very important element."<sup>1</sup>

In the making of landscapes that pertained to the notion of toy-like cities I employed the use of found materials, such as Magic Trees, miniature cardboard trees that sprout crystal foliage when a solution is poured on top, an instant environment! I also used objects with imagery, which were in keeping with nature, firecrackers and biscuit tins with flower imagery, a paper fan with tree and bird. This way of working relates to an area I began to explore during my third year of study, Pop Up Cities. This idea was

---

<sup>1</sup> Crawford, Ashley. Edgar, Ray. *Spray*, Craftsman House, Australia, 88.



founded through an observation of construction and demolition, and the notion that all we create is transitory. (refer to images 1,2&3)



1



2



3



I made two reasonable paintings based on made environments. The space in the works is not literal. The size of the work is 22x22cm and the objects painted within them almost true to their actual size. This scale and the palette I chose reinforces the notion that they are to be viewed as fun pieces. (images 4&5)



4



5

## Abstracting the Landscape

I decided to abandon working with the materials I had chosen for my initial three-dimensional environments. I had been seduced by the trendy, kitsch, nostalgic fashion of using quirky found materials. The environments were too obvious, not particularly intriguing and would not prompt the viewer to question what they were looking at. I was introduced to the book *Thinking Photography* and in particular the essay *Making Strange: The Shattered Mirror* written by Simon Watney.<sup>2</sup> The writing discusses the concept of *Ostranenie*, or the practice of making the ordinary appear strange. “Less than at any time does a simple reproduction of reality tell us anything about reality. Reality proper has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relationships, the factory lets say, no longer reveals those relationships. Therefore something actually has to be constructed, something artificial, something set up.”<sup>3</sup> “As early as 1915 Rodchenko had described his desire to show familiar objects in unfamiliar ways, through such Swiftian devices as extreme close-up, and so on.”<sup>4</sup> Alexander Rodchenko's (image 6) and Laszlo Moholy Nagy's (image7) abstracted the familiar by photographing familiar objects out of context. Through my practice I also aim to distort the familiar as a means of questioning it. However, rather than depicting everyday objects in an abstract fashion, I chose to construct abstract objects out of familiar materials.



6

---

<sup>2</sup> Burgin, Victor, (editor). *Thinking Photography*, The Macmillan Press LTD, London and Basingstoke, 1982, 155.

<sup>3</sup> Burgin, *Thinking Photography*, 166.

<sup>4</sup> Burgin, *Thinking Photography*, 164.





7

The work of the American artist Sarah Sze and Canadian artist Jessica Stockholder interested me in my third year of study and I think unwittingly their work was to influence the appearance of the three dimensional landscapes I was to construct. Both artists use found materials then manipulate them in such a way that they become abstract. The reason that I made my small landscapes appear abstract was to portray the way the city appears from a distance. When one views a city from afar, the clues that would usually indicate their purpose are not apparent and their function becomes abstract. Through this we may attain an objective view of the city. Lynn Cook's essay *Fabricating sight/site* focuses on Jessica Stockholder's installation *Your Skin in this Weather Bourne Eye-Threads & Swollen Perfume*, "On occasion, the actualities of the site are, like the components introduced into it, rendered abstract...."<sup>5</sup> By employing the use of, and then abstracting familiar materials, Stockholder allows us to view our everyday surrounds in a different way, a more objective way, as we do art.

---

<sup>5</sup> Cook, Lynne. *Your Skin in this Weather Bourne Eye-Threads & Swollen Perfume*, Dia Center for the Arts, New York, 1996, 29.



8

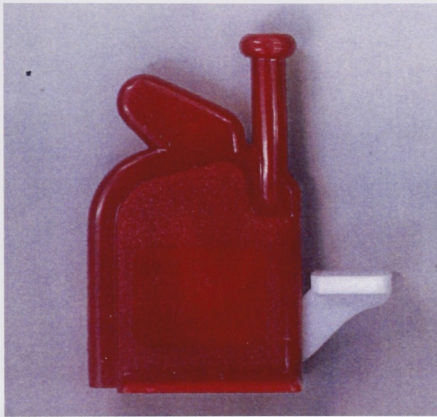


9

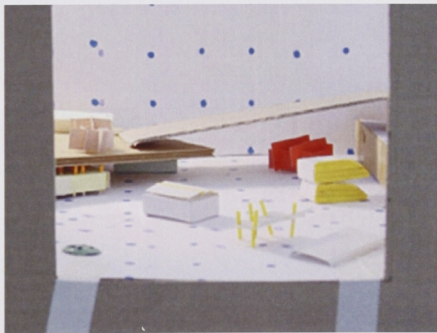
After watching a documentary that gave insight into the difference between modern man and Neanderthal I began to think of the object as a good indicator to the current thinking



of people. One example given was modern man's use of the object, in particular shell necklaces which were used for trade; the objects signified a change in thinking. The objects we create reflect our thinking, as they are the tools by which we conduct our lives. A plastic needle threader was one example of an object that I thought reflected how odd our thinking can be (image 10). I could recognize what it was made of but was not aware of its function which I found intriguing. It supported my thoughts about viewing all that we create in an objective fashion, and when done so the norm can appear quite bizarre.

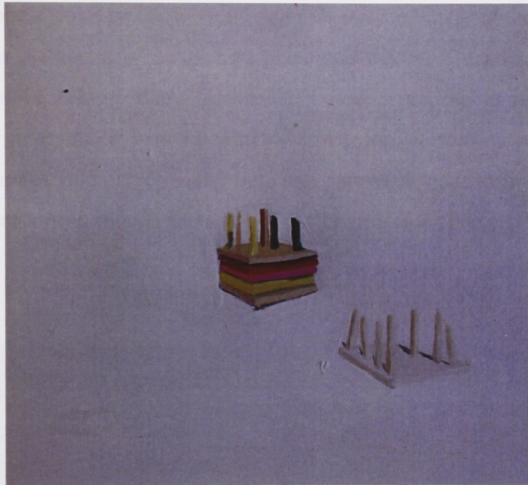


10



11

The following 3D models I made were of a more abstract appearance.(image 11) I used materials such as paper, cardboard and matchsticks, which allowed them to be easily assembled and wrecked, (Pop up Cities). I painted the objects in a representational fashion, however the space within the works is not a realistic one. I made paintings of the objects in an undefined space, as I did not want the viewer to be able to determine the objects scale as it may render them less enigmatic. (images 12 &13)



12



13



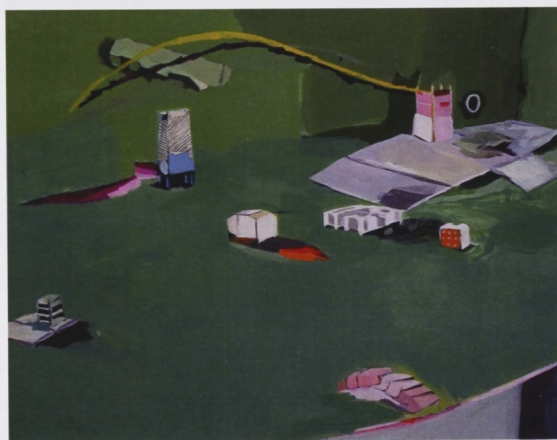
Robert Boynes criticism of these paintings is that they do not engage the viewer's eye and that it is difficult to convince people, through the painting, that the undefined space is intended to appear as such and was not merely neglected. Like a ram butting its head against a gate I kept trying to **ACTIVATE THAT SPACE!** In the following painting (image 14) I attempted to make the space more engaging by using shadows, so the objects would appear more grounded. I alluded to a sense of space by introducing objects that do not sit in the centre of the picture plane and made the brushwork more visible with slight shifts in colour. Viewing this work now it appears quite timid, which I attribute to the undesirable way in which I used the source material. Rather than translating the image in a larger scale, onto the canvas, I again had to reinterpret the information because even though the scale of the canvas was enlarged I kept the objects small.



14



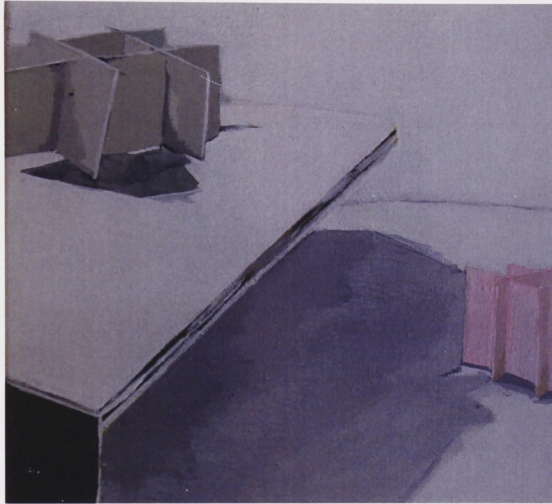
I struggled with the concept of activating the negative space. The working methods I was then to employ in the making of image 15 seemed to move farther and farther away from how I should be approaching the work. For example I painted the entire canvas with green wash, a colour I did not want to be evident on completion of the painting, thinking that this would force me to address the space (and admittedly make the space less daunting). The palette that I intended to use for the negative space within this painting was again white, however throughout the arduous process it also became a yellow painting and then finally an undesirable green, that made the scene reminiscent of a paddock. I did not want the viewer to recognize the space as a paddock, one reason being the viewer may interpret the scale of the buildings as that of real buildings, and then assume their function as being that of a building, making them less enigmatic.



15

In the making of painting number thirteen (image 16), I employed devices such as a cardboard frame that supported a grid on Perspex, as a means to aid composition. This enabled me to view the entire area within the frame as an image, rather than just the objects. However this method was not fool proof as the actual scene was too small, making the process difficult again. In an attempt to counteract this problem I took photos of the scene so to have a fixed image to refer to. On this occasion the technology used,

an instant camera, did not serve me well. The problem, (which is now embarrassingly, blatantly obvious) lay largely with the actual environment. Although I enlarged the objects in the painting the small scale of the objects themselves did not allow them to be a good source to work from.



16

### **A change in construction**

A move to Eye Block allowed me to use a corner of the room as an installation site. As a response to the larger site I began making larger objects. The materials I was then to employ were also used as a response to the new setting. As I was constructing the environments directly in the corner of the room, (and not in a cardboard box as I had done the smaller landscapes), I began to feel as though I was performing some form of home decoration. So the materials used became those used in home decoration, wallpapers and contacts. A familiar problem arose when it came to the painting aspect of the work, however. Although I had made larger objects, I stubbornly approached the work as I had done the smaller landscapes, and as a response to the larger objects simply added MORE space to the composition of the works.





17



18

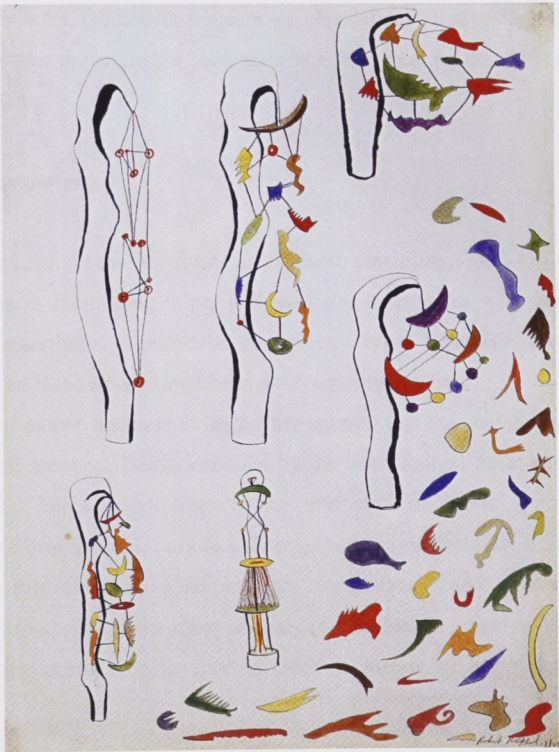


19

I had been working in this fashion of placing small objects in a large, ambiguous space, as I wanted them to be out of a familiar context. I thought that if I were to give the viewer less information, the paintings would be more intriguing and would provoke more questions. I was using the distanced perspective of the objects as I thought it necessary to convey my initial idea that the city is toy-like, and that this view of the city puts ones anxieties about such a space into perspective. I thought the detached view of the scene would express my thoughts about seeing the city in a more objective fashion. I wanted to make a comment about how it can be daunting and all consuming whilst inside the



parameters of the city and how these structures affect our thinking, but from a distance the structures appear miniscule, and people absolutely tiny. I wanted to raise the question about how we are socially conditioned to act in ‘appropriate’ ways, and to respond to things in a certain fashion. I wanted to question the status quo, to question our environment. A discussion held with Richard Larter however, made me realize that there were other aesthetic means by which I could express these ideas. Larter drew comparisons between my work and the drawings of Robert Klippel (image 20) which resulted in a shift in my thinking. Although I find Klippels drawings appealing, I now see that my paintings would not be particularly engaging if they were of this appearance.



20

Larter wanted my paintings to “scream look at me”, and for them to appear “meatier”. As a reaction to this comment I started to approach the paintings as close-ups with the object occupying most of the picture plane. I started painting from the photographs only altering the scale and colour. I initially felt reluctant to work in such a manner as it led me to question if I should bother painting them at all. However I realized it would be valuable to paint from the photograph to achieve a balance between painting in a representational manner and a manner that does not give too many clues to the nature of the objects. I wanted to paint the objects in a fashion that would lead people to view the work as a documentation, as a still life. Simultaneously, I wanted some alteration of the image to occur, so the materiality of the object is not so obvious as to render them less enigmatic. This work method is a means of persuading the viewer that the works are paintings of abstract things, rather than paintings of something that I have interpreted in an abstract fashion.

### **Considering the pattern**

I continued to question how one forms an aesthetic sensibility, because I consider this in itself to be quite a fascinating thing, and used this to consider why we place such an emphasis on the aesthetic, in particular the domestic type. I questioned whether it could be attributed to an instinctive animal behaviour, a nesting instinct.

The watching of nature documentaries further spurred this comparison between humans and other animal species. Being intrigued by the behaviour of other species makes me consider whether all our oddities can be attributed to ‘basic’, instinctive animal behaviour. Like bower birds, only less discriminating (we decorate in an assortment of colours), we create elaborate nests and act like peacocks and adorn ourselves with colourful coats, to appeal to the other animals of our species. Seeing human behaviour as we do other animals’ behaviour is another means of viewing our behaviour objectively.



As previously mentioned, I began constructing larger abstract objects for practical reasons. The material used for the first objects was a striped wallpaper, a uniformed pattern which gave a sense of space, however an ambiguous one. The first painting which resulted from this method of working is pleasing as it is an abstract form, however not enough consideration was given to the form made for the second work. The object is a loosely folded piece of paper and this is obviously so, so its function (which is no function) becomes apparent.



21



22

I decided to use potentially more familiar materials after viewing an object in a gutter. The object was shaped like a finger or fat stick, brown at one end and pink the other. I could recognize aspects of it so it was not entirely abstract which I found intriguing. I thought the use of more easily recognized materials would be another reason why the works would not be considered pure abstraction as it would rouse a sense of familiarity, people would question if the objects exist and if so, what is their function.

I considered using other familiar materials for the construction of the objects. I made one very basic object from the actual pages of house fashion magazines. The object was not as successful as those made from the more simplistic striped patterned paper; I decided that this would not become the source from which I would paint.



The next materials used in the construction of the object and environment brought about a desired response from my peers, one classmate in particular had the very same type of patterned paper lining her childhood toy-box. Their recognition of the patterns, but uncertainty as to what the objects were, created intrigue. I am using materials which spur a nostalgic response, and then place them in a different context as a means of creating intrigue.



23

The more familiar materials used (image 23) seemed to be aimed at an early nineteen eighties aesthetic, and the description on the back of the material reinforces this, “Nylex Cover-It provides the quick and easy solution to all your home decorating needs. It is inexpensive, easy to apply, and its uses are only limited by your imagination. The Cover-It Decorator range has something to suit every application with a wide variety of designs including, florals, plain colours, prints, wood grains and suedes.” The suggestion of uses

conjures images of an entire interior of a home that's been plastered with plastic house fashion wrap, (if the imagination permitted, of course). All three of the wallpapers I used were old, dusty, bottom of the shelf examples of how the time in which we view a particular thing alters our reading of it, and determines how we value it, both in a monetary and aesthetic sense.

Supporting my view that the historical context in which we see an object may affect how we perceive it is the book *Design in Context*.<sup>6</sup> The text describes objects and gives insight into social views of the time which support them (image 24&25). However to look at the objects without the text, out of context, rendered some of the objects quite abstract. The text also reinforces the notion that ones aesthetic sensibility is affected by issues other than just the visual, and brings into question why we do the things we do, and why we place an emphasis on the aesthetic, using the home as an example.

The text *Objects of Desire* also placed objects in an historical context. Somerset Morgan gives example of how odd an aesthetic opinion from 1922 can seem when viewed from a different era: "In early twentieth-century Britain, the possession of a bath, in a bathroom was regarded as a major sign of middle-class status",<sup>7</sup> "the matutinal tub divides the classes more effectively than birth, wealth or education."<sup>8</sup> Such social conditioning of how to view a bathtub seems absurd now, but of course such views have just 'progressed', the 2003 equivalent being the spa bath. Researching of historical precedents enables one to view design without an emotive social response as we do contemporary design and puts into perspective our contemporary existence. As I had gained perspective of my contemporary existence from a distanced view of Canberra, researching the history of the object proved to serve a similar purpose. It allowed me to see how sometimes odd historical fashions appear when seen out of context, and a realization that our current existence will be (if not already) viewed similarly.

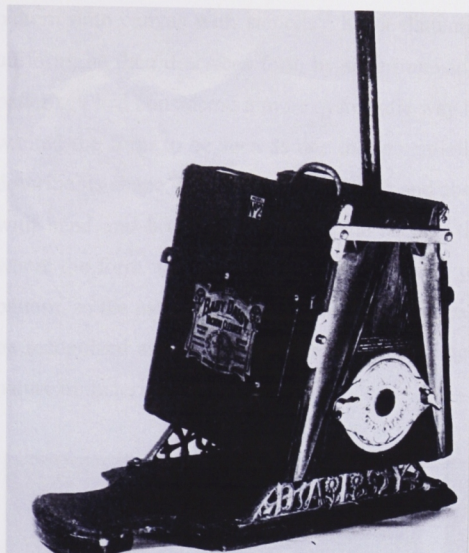
---

<sup>6</sup> Sparke, Penny. *Design in Context*, Bloomsberry Publishing Ltd, London, 1991, 8-249.

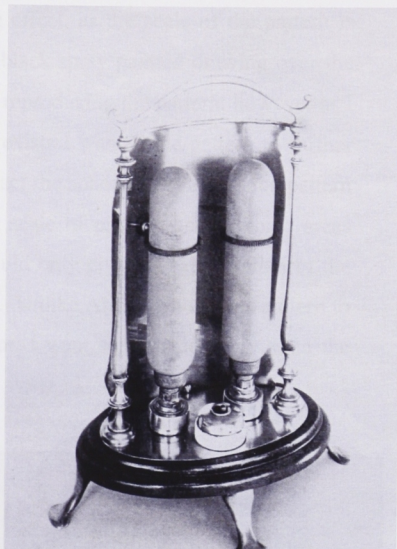
<sup>7</sup> Forty, Adrian. *Objects of Desire, Design and Society, 1750-1980*, Thames & Hudson, Great Brittain, London, 1986, 167.

<sup>8</sup> Forty., *Objects of Desire, Design and Society* , 167.





24



25

Seeing my environment differently motivated my initial work practice. Arkleys work method was also motivated by viewing his immediate environment in a different way, which in his case was instigated by overseas travel leading “to a re-evaluation of his sense of being Australian and, ultimately, to a reassessment of his subject matter.”<sup>9</sup>

Howard Arkley also considers the significance of the pattern. The most obvious correlation between my work and the work of Arkley is the use of pattern and our reasons for doing so are also similar. Arkley said he used pattern in “an attempt to give an open ended meaning. So that it looks abstract, but would also look familiar.”<sup>10</sup> Through my own practice I interpret this as meaning the response of the observer will be affected by previous experiences with the pattern. The way in which our use of pattern differs

<sup>9</sup> Crawford, Ashley. Edgar, Ray. *Spray*, Craftsman House, Australia, 21

<sup>10</sup> Crawford. Edgar. *Spray*, 32

however is how we use it to describe space and form. Arkleys method of translating the pattern onto canvas with stencils<sup>11</sup> has a flattening effect, as the scale of the pattern is uniform, he then describes form by superimposing black spray painted drawing over the pattern. I had considered a more systematic way of reproducing the pattern, however as I wanted the form to be seen as one that potentially exists I wanted the pattern to further describe its shape, and for it not to flatten and abstract the space. Translating the pattern with hand and brush only allowed me to vary the scale of pattern, and in some areas where the form was particularly foreshortened I would only give brief description of the pattern, so the pattern in itself became quite abstract. Unlike Arkley who wants pattern to be recognized as being derived from a home interior, I want some uncertainty as to the nature of materiality to occur.



26



27

---

<sup>11</sup> Crawford, Edgar. *Spray*, 14



Like Arkley I am using the familiar in a different context, as a means of drawing attention to the familiar. It is a way of making one observe that which they may have grown complacent with, a comment that the status quo is not necessarily normal. Arkley has amplified the colour and simplified the design of the houses as a way of informing the viewer that the works are not to be simply read as paintings of houses. In the book *Spray*, Ashley Crawford and Ray Edgar describe Arkleys work: "The reassuring stereotypes of comfortable middle-class style are exaggerated into a strange world of fantastic colours and vibrating shapes. Normality is enlarged until it appears quite bizarre."<sup>12</sup> I have constructed abstract objects from the patterned material so they are not read as home interiors, and will be a tool that promotes imagination, rather than a response of recognition that does not require much consideration.

### **The final process**

I succumbed to the charms of the Epi diascope for the drawing of photograph onto canvas and it proved to be a much more efficient way of working. It also helped me achieve an accurate portrayal of space and object, again, leading one to view the painting as a documentation of an existing scene, not an abstract interpretation.

Using shadows in the work is another method I have employed to persuade the viewer that perhaps these objects are real, in that a shadow alludes to there being an existing light source. The shadow grounds the objects and informs the viewer that the object is indeed sitting in the space in which it has been placed.

The surface of my paintings is prepared with four layers of gesso and whiting is mixed into diluted paint to emulate the chalky, matt appearance of wallpaper. Again I do this as I wish to rouse a feeling of familiarity within the viewer. It is necessary to paint over the entire surface of the painting approximately three to ten times otherwise the matt nature of the paint simply makes the paintings appear dull.

I have chosen to vary the size of the works, as it allows me to vary the scale of the space within the picture and the objects themselves. Through this method I aim to intrigue the

---

<sup>12</sup> Crawford, Edgar. *Spray*, 16.

viewer, making them again question what they are looking at. Are all the objects of similar size? Is one particular painting a true documentation of the scene (including scale) and the other paintings a close up or distanced view of the scene? This way of working will ideally lead the viewer to question how their body relates to the image. The perspective from which each work is approached also varies, reiterating this idea.

The titles of the works are taken directly from house paint swatches. I use the names of paint colours as they pertain to the notion of home decorating. By placing them in this seemingly ill fitting context I aim to further confuse the reading of the work, and create some humour. Examples include Stallion White W, Choral Singer D, Salsa Dance EDT, Buttercup M+ and Ceduna Yo.

## Conclusion

By constructing seemingly abstract objects out of familiar materials I have aimed to abstract the familiar and therefore lead one to question and be intrigued by that which is familiar. I have worked in this fashion to illustrate that that which is considered the norm can also be viewed as being quite odd if viewed objectively. I have aimed to use the familiar as a tool that will draw attention to the work and in turn draw attention to the familiar in its usual context.

I use the object as a means of viewing human behaviour in an objective fashion, as they are the tools by which people conduct their lives and can be an indicator to our thinking.

Researching the work of Sarah Sze, Jessica Stockholder, Howard Arkley and the practitioners of Oestraneie, made obvious that this way of thinking, (a questioning of ones immediate environment and that which is considered the norm), was not particularly new. However, the practice is of perpetual relevance as the environment in which humans live is constantly changing, and through this research it has become apparent that people continue to be fascinated by their immediate environment.

In the future I intend to continue working with methods of constructing three-dimensional objects and using these as a source to paint from. The materials used will again be those used in housing fashions, however I shall also employ materials that further perplex the viewer as to the actual nature of the objects, for example molded wax forms. I intend to use other materials in the construction of the objects so that their structure is not so reliant upon folding techniques. This will again alter the appearance of the forms and consequently the appearance of the paintings.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Borer, Alain. *The Essential Joseph Beuys*, MIT Press, USA, 1997, 7-239.
- Bonami, Francesco. Boris Staci. *Sarah Sze*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago USA, 1999, 6-33.
- Burgin, Victor, (editor). *Thinking Photography*, The Macmillan Press LTD, London and Basingstoke, 1982, 154-176.
- DiNoto, Andrea. *Art Plastic, Designed for Living*, Cross River Press, Japan, 1984, 42-208.
- Cook, Lynne. Schwabsy, Barry. Tillman, Lynn. *Jessica Stockholder*, Phaidon Press Limited, USA, 1995, 8-146.
- Cook, Lynne. *Your Skin in this Weather Bourne Eye-Threads & Swollen Perfume*, Dia Center for the Arts, New York, 1996, 23-37.
- Couture, Lisa Anne. Rashid, Hani. *Flux*, Phaidon Press Limited, London and New York, 2002, 12-49, 68-190.
- Crawford, Ashley. Edgar, Ray. *Spray*, Craftsman House, Australia, 6-129.
- Edwards, Deborah. *Robert Klippel*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Australia, 2002, 58-223.
- Forty, Adrian. *Objects of Desire, Design and Society, 1750-1980*, Thames & Hudson, Great Britain, London, 1986, 37- 167.

Livingstone, Marco. Morrell, Timothy. Radford, Ron. *Howard Arkley/The Home Show*, Australian Council, 1999, 14-16.

Miller, R.Craig. *U.S Design 1975-2000*, Prestal Verlag, Munich, Londen and New York, 2001, 16-228.

Papanek, Victor. *Design for the Real World*, Butler and Tanner LTD, Great Brittain, 1985, 3-27.

*Sarah Sze*. Thames and Hudson Ltd, London and New York, 2000, 1-101.

Sparke, Penny. *Design in Context*, Bloomsberry Publishing Ltd, London, 1991, 8-249.

## Image list

Image 1

Photograph with acrylic paint, 16x10cm.

2

Photograph, 16x10cm

3

Photograph, 8x10cm

4

Acrylic paint on canvas, untitled, 15x15cm

5

Acrylic paint on canvas, untitled, 22x22cm

6

Alexander Rodchenko, *The Driver*, 1933. *Thinking Photography*, Victor Burgin, The Macmillan Press LTD, London and Basingstoke, 1982, 165.

7

Laszlo Moholy Nagy, *Paris Drain*, 1929. *Thinking Photography*, Victor Burgin, The Macmillan Press LTD, London and Basingstoke, 1982, 168.

8

Sarah Sze, *Untitled (St. James)*, mixed media, 1998, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London. Sarah Sze, Staci Boris and Francesco Bonami, *Museum of Contemporary art*, Chicago, 33.

9

Jessica Stockholder, *Your Skin In This Weather Bourne Eye-Threads & Swollen Perfume*, 1996, Dia Center for the Arts, New York. *Your Skin In This Weather Bourne Eye-Threads & Swollen Perfume*, Lynne Cook, Dia Center for the Arts, New York, 33.

10

Needle Threader, 3x5cm

11

Installation, mixed media, 50x30x50cm, 2002

12

Acrylic on canvas, untitled, 22x22cm, 2002

13

Acrylic on canvas, untitled, 22x22cm, 2002

14

Acrylic on canvas, untitled, 65x65cm, 2002

15

Acrylic on canvas, untitled, 65x80cm, 2002

16

Acrylic on canvas, untitled, 22x22cm, 2002

17

Installation, mixed media, 2002

18

Acrylic on canvas, untitled, 25x35cm, 2002

19

Acrylic on canvas, untitled, 85x55cm, 2002

20

Robert Klippel, Untitled, pen, ink, and watercolour on paper, 53.9x41.9cm, August 1949.  
Robert Klippel, Deborah Edwards, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2002, 61

21

Photograph, 25.5x20.5cm, 2002

22

Acrylic on canvas, untitled, 25x25cm, 2002

23

Photograph, 25.5x 25.5, 2003

24&25

Design in Context, Penny Sparke, Bloomsbury Publishing Ltd, London, 1991, 175

26

Howard Arkley, *Floriated Residence*, acrylic on canvas, 203x153cm, 1994. Spray, Ashley Crawford and Ray Edgar, Craftsmans House, 1995, 115.

27

Howard Arkley, *Indoors-Outdoors*, acrylic on canvas, 203x 153cm, 1994. Spray, Ashley Crawford and Ray Edgar, Craftsmans House, 1995, 114

28

*Stallion White W*, acrylic on canvas, 130x140cm, 2003

29

*Orange Tutti*, acrylic on canvas, 130x100cm, 2003

30

*Owl Hoot*, acrylic on canvas, 90x90cm, 2003

31

*Jimmy*, acrylic on canvas, 100x100cm, 2003

32

*Butter Cup M+*, acrylic on canvas, 110x144cm, 2003

33

*Billy Goat*, acrylic on canvas, 50.5x61cm, 2003

34

*Peach Partner*, acrylic on canvas, 47x64cm, 2003

35

*Hot Mamma*, acrylic on canvas, 35x35cm, 2003

36

*Lickety Split*, acrylic on canvas, 31x23cm, 2003

37

*Young Gun*, acrylic on canvas, 100x130cm, 2003



Artists statement  
Helen Shelley

*Seeing the Object Objectively*

The body of work that has resulted from my honours year of study is titled *Seeing the Object Objectively*. Through my work I have argued that it is the context in which we see an object that informs the viewer how they are to interpret it. By constructing abstract objects out of familiar materials (wallpapers) I have aimed to abstract the familiar and therefore lead the viewer to be intrigued and question that which is familiar. By taking the familiar out of its usual context I have aimed to illustrate that that which is considered the norm may also be seen as quite odd when viewed objectively.

The artists who influenced my thinking and consequently the appearance of my work were those who through various means aimed to make the familiar appear odd.

Sarah Sze and Jessica Stockholder use found materials and manipulate them in such a way that renders them abstract, they abstract the familiar.

Howard Arkley depicts familiar household patterns in an amplified form as a means of drawing attention to that which we may have grown complacent with.

And the practitioners of Oostranenie or 'making strange' who photographed the familiar in such a way that made the norm appear strange.

My work process involved taking photographs of the three-dimensional abstract objects in their environment and this became the source from which I paint. I consider it important to paint the constructed environment, as I do not want the materiality of the objects to be apparent because it will render them less enigmatic. Simultaneously I wish to paint the objects in a manner that convinces people that the objects exist, so they are viewed as documentations rather than abstract interpretations.

To achieve a surface that would emulate the sometimes chalky, matt appearance of wallpaper I mixed whiting medium into diluted acrylic paint, again I do this to rouse a sense of familiarity within the viewer.

The titles of the works are taken from house paint swatches. I use these as they pertain to home decorating, will confuse the reading of the work and create some humour.





















